

THE CATHOLIC ART QUARTERLY



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CONTENTS

Editorial	72
The Visual Arts and the Teaching Church — <i>Terence R. O'Connor, S.J.</i>	73
Two Wood Carvings <i>by Ivan Mestrovic</i>	75
A Ciborium	81
An Ivory Relief	82
Symposium: On a Just Wage for Artists	
<i>Nina Polcyn</i>	86
<i>John B. Shaw</i>	86
<i>Catherine Buehler</i>	87
<i>Edmund Demers</i>	88
On Professional Art: A Report —	
<i>Rev. Anthony Lauck, C.S.C. and Adé Bethune</i>	89
Icons — A Great Christian Art — <i>Brother Franciscus Willett, C.S.C.</i>	90
Illustrations	91
Book Reviews:	
The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent, by Miguel Covarrubias —	
<i>John Howard Benson and Graham Carey</i>	95
Illustrations	96, 97, 98
On Dress — <i>Graham Carey</i>	100
Notes	101
1955 C.A.A. National Convention Announcement	102

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The Spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world Alleluia

The earthly business of making things is in dire need of re-sanctification. It must be returned to the Heavenly Maker. Human creation is deathly sick, and needs graces from above if it is to recover from its sickness.

To return making to some degree of normality, we must, first of all, see that there is something wrong with the present system. Though this is the first step in reform, we do not emphasize it in this journal because the point really does not need stressing, and emphasis on it may so easily degenerate into uncharity. The second step is an act of the will — a resolve to resist the evils of which we have become aware. The third is a basic analysis of the artistic situation, so that the efforts at correction, by people of good will, may not be misdirected. This work is philosophical. All our publications on the four causes, the wheel of artifice, and the like, have been attempts at such a necessary analysis. And lastly, there is the practical application of our philosophical principles to the problems of the artist, the patron, and the teacher.

The limitations of such a journal as this, make it impossible to present much of our message, either theoretical or practical, in any one issue. The full development of our general theme would cover an enormous number of printed pages. We are limited to about thirty-two pages four times a year. Our policy is to try to say as much in those few pages as possible, and to arrange the contributions so that they reinforce and support one another. We hope, therefore,

that our serious readers will plan to read the whole of each issue, so as to get the most benefit from this interlocking of ideas. In mathematics, which is a science of quantity, one plus one equals two, but in qualitative matters, such as artists are concerned with, one plus one equals five, is an equation closer to the truth. The whole is much more than the mere sum of the parts. For example, in their review of the book on Indian art, Mr. Benson and Mr. Carey stress the importance of what they call the "significant profile," and in his essay on Russian icons, Brother Franciscus points out that a holy image, of its inner necessity, must always face the worshiper, both eyes looking forward. An understanding of these two points taken together is more than the sum of the understanding of each separately. The two understandings combine into a deeper realization of a fundamental artistic truth.

In a similarly helpful way, Father O'Connor's article on the true purpose of liturgical art adds much to a solution of the problem with which the contributors to the symposium are wrestling.

We once bought a very expensive paint brush, the kind which can be used to paint houses. With the brush was a printed slip which said, in effect: "You have bought a good brush, and have paid a good price. It is the best brush that we know how to make. Please take care of it."

So we say with our *Quarterly*: we are making it as well as we can. You have bought it. Get your money's worth out of it.

THE VISUAL ARTS AND THE TEACHING CHURCH

A solution to the controversy on "modern" liturgical art cannot be found in a consideration of aesthetic values or "fitting decoration." Father O'Connor here considers the basic purpose of liturgical art and brings theology and history to bear witness to the true place that art should have in the life of the Church today. This article originally appeared in the Sept., 1954, issue of Theological Studies.

By Terence R. O'Connor, S.J.



TWO EVENTS in recent years have given new impetus to the somewhat long-standing controversy on liturgical art. One was the construction, under the guiding spirit of the late Père Couturier, O.P., of the three "modern" churches at Assy, Vence and Audincourt.¹ The other was the Instruction of the Holy Office, *De arte sacra*, of June 30, 1952.² The complexity of the controversy has been made more manifest by the variety of allied questions subsequently discussed—at times rather warmly—in theological and artistic publications. To mention but a few: To what extent should the Christian artist hold to "traditional" Christian styles and iconography? Can he legitimately borrow from "modern" techniques and symbolism, even to the extent of employing the "grotesque" idioms of secular abstractionists and distortionists? Is there a specifically Christian aesthetic? Have official ecclesiastical directives tended so to curb the self-expression of the artist that creative initiative is jeopardized? Should liturgical art be "popular" or esoteric?

Numerous questions of this kind demand attention if a proper balance is to be found, so that art may regain its true place in the life of the Church today. But none of these individual problems will find a solid solution unless a more important

aspect of the issue be kept clearly in mind, namely, the purpose of liturgical art. It is more important not only because it is more fundamental, but because it serves best to make clear that what is involved here is no mere side-issue about elusive aesthetic values or "fitting decoration," but something directly connected with defined matters of faith and with the practical efficacy of the teaching Church. Unfortunately, however, this very aspect of the question, the basic purpose of liturgical art, has suffered from relative neglect and even misrepresentation.

Since the problem is theological, the present remarks will be based primarily on Scripture and tradition. Since the problem

¹*L'art sacré*, Nov.-Dec., 1951, and *Liturgical Arts*, Feb., 1951, Feb., 1952, and May, 1952, offer worthwhile descriptions and evaluations of this significant project.

²*AAS*, XLIV (1952), 542. It is clear that this Instruction was issued to check certain extreme tendencies in the liturgical arts. It has been understood by some, however, as a blanket proscription of whatever can be loosely grouped under the vague term "modern," even though the Instruction cites from the Encyclical, *Mediator Dei* (*AAS*, XXXIX [1947], 521): "It is eminently fitting that the art of our times have a free opportunity to serve the sacred edifices and sacred rites with due reverence and with due honor" (p. 590).—"Anyone who thinks that the *Instruction on Sacred Art* decrees the death of the new art—of living art—is in error. The *Instruction* does not intend to be a lesson in art; it seeks only to make firm certain values imposed by the nature of a church, by what the *Instruction* calls 'ecclesiastical tradition'" (Emmanuel Card. Gonçalves Cerejeira, "Church Architecture and the Modern Spirit," *Four Quarters*, April 15, 1954, p. 17).

is practical, the order will be the concrete framework of history, following the evolution of God's providence and the practice of the Church in the use of visual, sensible forms and symbols.

THE DIVINE PEDAGOGY

In his first epistle to Timothy, St. Paul says of Almighty God: "... it is his will that all men should be saved, and be led to recognize truth."³ Theologians point out that there is question here not of a mere velleity but of a will that is efficacious in the sense that it affords the means necessary for men to come to a knowledge of God. God is, then, a teacher, leading men to knowledge — or better, to wisdom.

Now since the ways of God are infinitely wise, it can be fruitful to consider his means of informing the minds of men. For with a penetration infinitely surpassing our own, he "knows the hearts of all men,"⁴ those hearts which are the primary concern of the teaching Church. It is only reasonable, then, to ask ourselves what the techniques of the divine pedagogy are.

God's methods are manifold. He has taught us, to use St. Paul's expression, "in many ways and by many means."⁵ But one device has stood out conspicuously from the very beginning. "From the foundations of the world men have caught sight of his invisible nature, his eternal power and his divineness, as they are known through his creatures."⁶ In other words, God uses the visible things of sense to lead men to the invisible truths of the spirit, *per visibilia ad invisibilia*. "See how the skies proclaim God's glory, how the vault of heaven betrays his craftsmanship."⁷

However, not content with the powerful didactic of the works of creation, God made use of the more direct method of supernatural revelation, retaining through-

out the device *per visibilia ad invisibilia*. It is seen on almost every page of Scripture, at least in the constant use of striking sense-imagery. But there are more conspicuous examples. I shall choose but one.

When Almighty God committed his covenant to Moses on the cloud-covered peak of Sinai, he summed up all the essentials of the Law in the few brief verses of the decalogue.⁸ The account in Deuteronomy repeats the commandments, and then continues: "These words the Lord spoke ... with a loud voice, adding nothing more."⁹ Nothing more, that is, to what was the essential revelation. Actually, however, he did add more, a great deal more. Chapter after chapter is required for the detailed stipulations of the liturgy: precise instructions for the construction of the ark and for the manner of sacrifice, meticulous directions concerning the materials, colors and adornment in jewels and embroidery of the sacred vestments, and so on, page after page.¹⁰

For the accomplishment of this enormous task Moses is given a helper: "Here is the name of the man I have appointed to help thee, Beseleel. ... I have filled him with my divine spirit, making him wise, adroit and skillful in every kind of craftsmanship, so that he can design whatever is to be designed in gold, silver, bronze, marble, precious stones and woods of all sorts."¹¹

But to what purpose all this splendor of liturgical symbolism? "Because it is a token ... reminding you that I am the Lord, and you are set apart for me."¹² "... that they shall know that I am the Lord their God."¹³ Yet why this elaborate means of merely repeating what had already been clearly stated in the first commandment? Because for God the written word, even when graved with his own finger on the tablets of the Law, and the spoken word, even when preached by the inspired Moses, are not enough. Moses the teacher needs Beseleel the artist. As in natural revelation, so here, God uses the visible, the sensible,

³ 1 Tim. 2:4. The translations of Msgr. Knox are used throughout. ⁴ Acts 1:24.

⁵ Heb. 1:11. ⁶ Rom. 1:20.

⁷ Ps. 18:2. ⁸ Exod. 20:2-17.

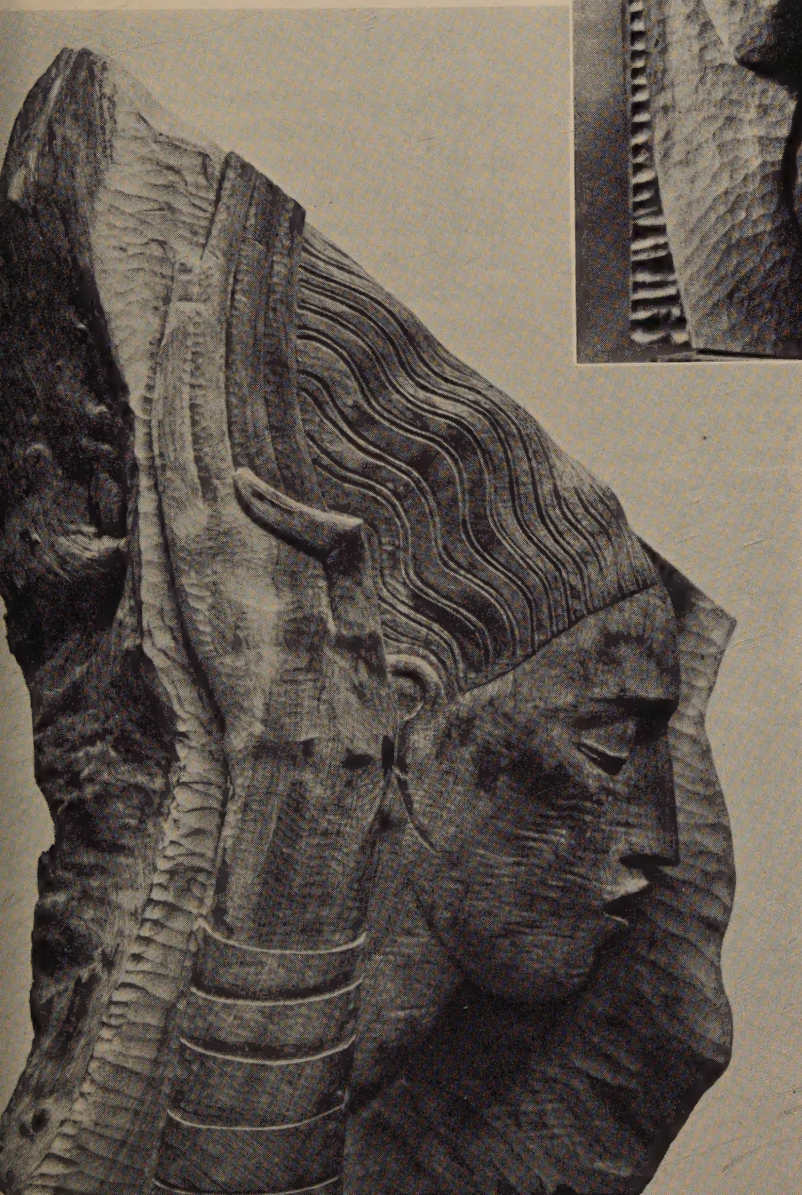
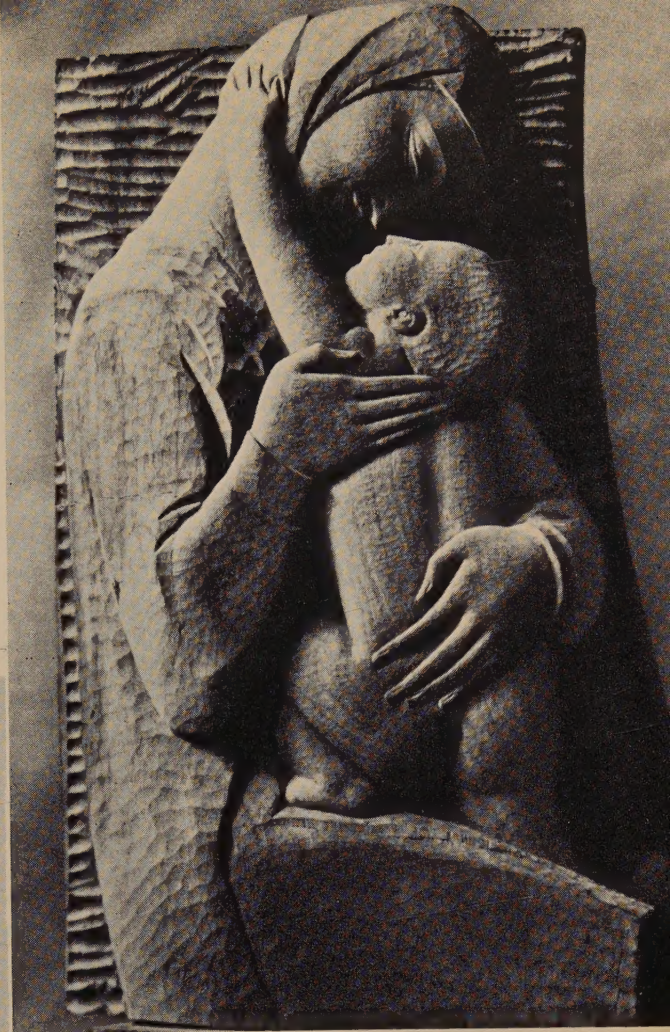
⁹ Deut. 5:22. ¹⁰ Exod. 25-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 21:2-5. ¹² *Ibid.* 31:13.

¹³ *Ibid.* 29:46.

TWO WOOD CARVINGS BY
JAN MESTROVIC

MADONNA WITH CHILD
Wood, life size.



ANGEL
Wood, life size.

to lead men to knowledge of the invisible, and employs the ministry of beauty for the teaching of truth.

But even this was not enough. When men still refused to hear God's lesson aright, he sent his own Word, Eternal Truth Itself. That Truth, spurned by men immersed in sense, became Itself a thing of sense: "The Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us."¹⁴ St. Athanasius lays clear stress on this didactic aspect of the Incarnation.

He deals with them as a good teacher with his pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means. . . . Men had turned from the contemplation of God above and were looking for him in the opposite direction, down among created things and things of sense. The Saviour of us all, the Word of God, in his great love, took to himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, halfway. He became himself an object for their senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might come to a knowledge of the Father through the works which he, the Word, did in the body.¹⁵

It is again the same principle, *per visibilia ad invisibilia*, expressed by our Lord him-

¹⁴ Jn. 1:14.

¹⁵ *Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi*, 15 (PG, XXV, 121 C-D); transl., *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, by a Religious of C.S.M.V. S.Th. (N.Y., 1946). This notion of the Incarnate Word as a visual didactic recurs frequently in the Fathers. He became Man "so that by reason of his body he might come within the ken of bodily creatures — a thing otherwise impossible because of the incomprehensibility of his nature" (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orat.*, XXX [PG, XXXVI, 132 A]). "The bodily activity of Our Lord is a manifestation of his divinity; and his invisible attributes are made known to us by those that are visible" (St. Ambrose, *Lib. IV in cap. 4 Lucae* [PL, XV, 1626 A]). "Invisible by reason of his own nature, he became visible by reason of ours; the Incomprehensible desired to be comprehended" (St. Leo, *Sermo II de nativitate* [PL, LIV, 195 A]).

¹⁶ Jn. 14:9.

¹⁷ Any sane pedagogy proceeds from the known to the unknown. But the aim of Christ's pedagogy is not merely knowledge but love. "The kingdom of heaven is compared to earthly

self when he told Philip: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."¹⁶ In the Preface for Christmas, the liturgy sings once more of this reason for the Incarnation: ". . . that while we recognize God visibly, we may be drawn by him to love of things unseen."

The same technique is seen throughout our Lord's entire pedagogy. In parables rich in sense imagery he spoke of the sower of seed, lilies of the field, sparrows, and fish of the sea.¹⁷ He confirmed his teaching by miracles, sensible signs of God's sanction.¹⁸ He established a visible Church and endowed it with sacraments, using such commonplace material things as water, bread and wine to signify and even confer an invisible reality, grace.¹⁹

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHURCH



THE CHURCH, being divine, evolved in her turn ever new manifestations of this divine didactic. The sacramental system flowered into the various forms of the liturgy,²⁰ bringing in its train those masterpieces of liturgical art which, besides being

things so that the mind may ascend from knowledge already acquired to an understanding of things as yet unknown, raising itself up to the invisible by similitudes based on the visible . . .; so that, since it is accustomed to loving what is known, it may learn to love also what is unknown" (St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. XI in evang.* [PL, LXXVI, 1114D]).

¹⁸ Christ performed his miracles ". . . that we might wonder at the invisible God by reason of his visible works . . . and yearn for the vision of the Invisible himself, whom we know as invisible from visible reality" (St. Augustine, *Tract. XXIV in Ioannem*, 1 [PL, XXXV, 1592-93]).

¹⁹ "For the rehabilitation of sinners, it was necessary that man should proceed from sensible things to knowledge of the spiritual, should refer to God his attachment to them, and use them ordinately in accordance with God's intention. Hence the institution of the sacraments was necessary, by which man is taught spiritual truths by means of sensible things" (St. Thomas, *In IV Sent.*, t. 4, d. 1, a. 2, ad 1m).

one of the greatest glories of the Christian past, formed an integral part of the cycle of salvation: life-giving grace and truth emanating from the One God, vesting itself in beauty, educating to goodness and leading back to the One.

There is no need here to illustrate once again the truism that the history of arts is the reflection of the history of ideas. What calls for emphasis is that great Christian art is a singularly striking exemplification of that truism precisely because it was, of set purpose, didactic. Much of the art of today, for example, for all its confusion and obscurity, is none the less an accurate index of the confusion and obscurity of contemporary ideologies. Bound by some subtle psychological necessity, it reflects its intellectual climate, but often in spite of itself. For an artist may aim at an expression of confusion,²¹ but he hardly aims at confusion of expression.

But when C. R. Morey says that "Byzantine art, at its best, remains the finest expression of Christian dogma that Christianity has produced,"²² that religious expression should not be thought of as something which occurred unconsciously, as a sort of *operatio sequitur esse* of the age. It was the direct outcome of an explicit policy, jointly fostered by emperor and hierarchy, "to propagate an ideology," as André Grabar expresses it.²³ For that

²⁰The *Mystagogic Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem (PG, XXXIII, 1059 ff.; *Monumenta eucharistica et liturgica vetustissima*, ed. J. Quasten [Bonn, 1935], pp. 70-110) are forceful evidence of the didactic efficacy of liturgical symbolism in the early Church, the kind of efficacy the liturgical movement is striving to regain. Cf. also R. W. Felix, O.S.B., *Some Principles of Psychology as Illustrated in the Sacramental System of the Church* (Washington, D.C., 1924).

²¹For example, in a panel representing the pains of the damned, or in Brueghel's "Temptations of St. Anthony."

²²C. R. Morey, *Christian Art* (N.Y., 1935), p. 33.

²³André Grabar, *Byzantine Painting* (N.Y., 1953), p. 23.

fusion of Judaic and Graeco-Roman traditions, sought vainly by Philo, foretold by St. Paul as one of the works of Christ,²⁴ preached fearlessly by Justin Martyr, was seen now as a *fait accompli* wrought by Christian truth. Pope and emperor had joined forces to fashion a world-embracing supernatural society based on a "new truth" surpassing all previous philosophies because it found in the Trinity and Incarnation the meaning of all being and all history.

The artists commissioned to give visual expression to this inspiring conception responded magnificently. Those idioms of pagan iconography and architecture long used to express the might of the Roman Empire were now supernaturalized by delicate nuances and the admixture of Christian symbolism to depict the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. Their monuments remain today in Constantinople, Salonika, Rome and Ravenna,²⁵ repeating still, through the telling imagery of architectural form and glowing mosaic, the profound dogmas of the early Councils and Fathers, with the exultant overtones of Athanasius' *Against the Pagans* and Augustine's *City of God*.

The rise of the bitter iconoclast controversy in the 8th century served to make officially explicit this didactic purpose of liturgical art, as is seen by the condemnation of the heresy by the Fourth Council of Constantinople:

The sacred image of Our Lord Jesus Christ should receive honor and veneration equal

²⁴Eph. 2:11-21.

²⁵The explicit didactic of the famous Ravenna mosaics is described by Otto G. von Simson, *Sacred Fortress* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 1-22. When, in the middle of the sixth century, Theodoric's Arian forces were besieging Ravenna, Justinian, neglecting his army, expended his funds on the erection and adornment of churches, exposing in brilliant artistic form and symbol the theologico-political system he defended. Strange stratagem for a successor of Caesar, but it prevailed. Cf. also A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, 53-72.

to that given to the book of the holy Gospels. For as all attain to salvation by means of the words of Scripture, so all, whether learned or illiterate, draw profit from the direct message expressed by means of color in works of art. For the language of the colored picture preaches and fosters the same truths as the written word.²⁶

While no one can question the value of the contributions speculative theology has made to the efficacy of the teaching Church, yet none of the great theological systems has received such a formal and striking encomium as that in the above definition. Countless Christians suffered torture and death in the defense of holy images, and some of them were canonized as martyrs of the faith. There may be some who are willing to die for the doctrine of the real distinction between essence and existence or for the Suarezian modes, but this would seem a rather insecure path to the honors of the altar.

FLOWERING OF GOTHIC



NCE REAFFIRMED, the technique *per visibilia and invisibilia* went on in time to evolve new forms. The somber restraint of early Romanesque reiterated the severe mystical theology of contemporaneous monasticism. But as monasticism spread, its spirit evolved and sought fuller expression in the use of motifs borrowed from treasured illuminated manuscripts and from the decorative techniques brought to the continent by followers of

²⁶Can. 3 (*Mansi*, XVI, 399; *Denz.*, 377). That the canon has reference not only to the sacred image of our Lord but to sacred images in general is clear from the other acts of the Council, as well as from the earlier condemnation in the Second Council of Nicaea (Act. VII; *Mansi*, XIII, 378; *Denz.*, 302).

²⁷"I need hardly mention the boundless height of the churches, the immoderate length, the meaningless width, the elaborate adornments and curious kinds of imagery. For such things impede devotion by attracting the attention of those who pray" (St. Bernard, *Apol. ad Guillelmum*, XII [*PL*, CLXXXII, 914 C]).

Alcuin. The mighty Bernard fulminated against the new tendency, but to no avail.²⁷ His own immediate followers became the vanguard in the movement that would bring Romanesque to a more vitally expressive maturity throughout the whole of western Christendom.²⁸ That movement led to the flowering of Gothic, which in its turn translated into fresh idioms of stone and colored glass the powerful new conceptions of the great Scholastic theologians.

To the Middle Ages, art was didactic.

All that it was necessary that men should know . . . was taught them by the windows of the church or by the statues in the porch. . . . The countless statues, disposed in scholarly design, were a symbol of the marvellous order that through the genius of St. Thomas Aquinas reigned in the world of thought. Through the medium of art the highest conceptions of theologian and scholar penetrated to some extent the minds of even the humblest of the people.²⁹

The idea is clear in St. Thomas' own teaching:

There were three reasons for the intro-

²⁸In the early twelfth century Cistercian monks were active in developing that form of Romanesque known as Burgundian; cf. C. R. Morey, *Mediaeval Art* (N.Y., 1942), pp. 236-40. During the same period, monks of Cluny exerted widespread influence by their use of art as a handmaid of truth. "Sculpture was reborn in France in the eleventh century. It was soon adopted as the most powerful auxiliary of thought by the abbots of Cluny, Saint Hugh and Peter the Venerable. . . . They believed in the power and virtue of art" (Emile Mâle, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* [N.Y., 1949], p. 17).

²⁹Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century* (N.Y., 1913), p.vii. — "The Cathedral is the mirror of science, and in fact, all kinds of knowledge, even the humblest, such as fitted men for manual labor and for the making of calendars, and also the highest, such as the liberal arts, philosophy and theology, were given in plastic form. Thus the cathedral could readily serve as a visible catechism, where the man of the thirteenth century could find in simple outline all that he needed to believe and to know" (M. de Wulf, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages* [Princeton Univ. Press, 1922], pp. 104-5).

duction of the use of the visual arts (*imagines*) in the Church: first, for the instruction of the uneducated, who are taught by them as by books; second, that the mystery of the Incarnation and the examples of the saints be more firmly impressed on our memory by being daily represented before our eyes; third, to enkindle affective devotion, which is more efficaciously evoked by what is seen than by what is heard.³⁰

In other words, religious instruction, in the full sense of the term, for all classes of men. For the visual didactic has a profound efficacy peculiarly its own. Book, pulpit, and classroom are not enough.³¹

But time was preparing a new attack. With the 16th century came the new iconoclasm of the Reformers. The Council of Trent countered by condemning the heresy anew, with particular stress on the didactic value of the visual arts.³² Renaissance artists, for all their enthusiasm for ancient forms of beauty, were alive to the current conflict of ideas, and met the attack with a new polemic emphasis in their works—for example, the frequent representations of those parts of the theology of the sacraments which the Reformers rejected.³³

SOME CONCLUSIONS

What follows from what has been said is that Christian art, particularly liturgical

³⁰ *In IV Sent.*, t. 3, d. 9, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3m.

³¹ "[Masterpieces of Christian art] . . . not only translate into easy reading and universal language the Christian truths; they also communicate the intimate sense and emotion of these truths with an effectiveness, lyricism and ardor that, perhaps, is not contained in even the most fervent preaching" (Pius XII, in an address to a group of Italian artists, April 8, 1952 [*Catholic Mind*, Nov. 1952, p. 698]).

³² "Let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations, the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith . . .; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints, the miracles of God and salutary examples are set

art, is more than a pleasing ornament fittingly, but unnecessarily, hung on the fabric of Christian thought.³⁴ The didactic use of the visual arts according to the timeless technique *per visibilia ad invisibilia* has been formally defined as pertaining to the Deposit of Faith. Our art has a job to do, and that is to teach. There is its primary *raison d'être*. Moreover, in the past whenever Christian art has been truly great, that principle has been most clearly realized and most splendidly exemplified. Conversely, when in recent centuries that principle tended to be obscured, Christian art lost the force of its message (and that is the real damage), but at the same time it became poor art even from the aesthetic point of view. It aimed at being not pertinent but pretty. There was much sweetness but little light; much ugliness but without even the power of expression of the grotesque.

Now, whatever be the judgment on contemporary, or "modern," liturgical art, it is, in many of its manifestations, an honest reaction against the weak misrepresentations of recent centuries, with a view to making Christian art once more a true apostle of the Christian dynamic. Granted that the movement has had its extremes. To reject it out of hand, however, would

before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints, and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety" (Sess. XXV, decr. 2 [*Mansi*, XXXIII, 171 D; *Denz.*, 985]; transl. H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* [St. Louis, 1941], p. 484).

³³ ". . . the art of the Counter Reformation defends all the dogmas attacked by the Protestants" (E. Mâle, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century*, p. 168). In the pages following, Mâle describes the fullness of that apologetic.

³⁴ "It is an error . . . to think of the sacred liturgy as merely the outward or visible part of divine worship or as an ornamental ceremonial" (*Mediator Dei*, n. 25). It is clear from the Encyclical itself, e.g., n. 195, that this refers also to liturgical art.

be no less rash than to condemn all modern literature because much of it is unprincipled and vapid. An issue so intimately affecting the efficacious teaching of Christian truth cannot be dismissed with snap judgments.

It is clear that Christian art, if it is to be faithful to its didactic mission, must be traditional in content; that is, it must be based on and inspired by revealed truth.³⁵ But should it be traditional as regards form? Is it in some sense required to perpetuate the great styles hallowed by long use?

Certainly the artist can learn from the past; he must. But one of the things he will learn quickly is that the great artists of the past did not hesitate to abandon any form, style, symbol, technique, or system

³⁵"The Ordinary shall never permit to be shown in churches, or other sacred places, images which represent a false dogma, or which are not sufficiently decent and moral, or which would be an occasion of dangerous error to the unlearned" (CIC, can. 1279 #3).

³⁶This is true of even the most representative Christian styles. Romanesque, for example, is sometimes described as having developed gradually, smoothly, "organically," from the earlier basilica style. Yet "... forsaking the laborious quest for rare materials and shaking off the servitude of consecrated forms, [the Romanesque architects] built with a logic and freedom which, though awkward and clumsy at the outset, have nevertheless the powerful charm of sincerity. This independence bore fruit in marvelous achievements. They built with the materials of their own locality, for the climate of their own locality, and in accord with the needs and discernment of their contemporaries" (E. Enlart, "L'architecture romane," *Histoire de l'art*, ed. A. Michel [Paris, 1905 ff.], 1, 2, 444).

³⁷Cf. A. Grabar, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.

³⁸These and other instances of Christian use of pagan symbolism are treated by H. Lützel, *Die christliche Kunst des Abendlandes* (Bonn, 1932), pp. 15-16. "As in the catacombs, so here in the realm of mosaics, we find the earliest Christian art making free use of the materials of the Roman antique tradition" (J. Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* [Princeton Univ. Press, 1947], p. 427).

³⁹Pope St. Clement uses this figure in his Letter to the Corinthians, *I Clem. ad Corinthios*, 25 (ed. Funk, I, 132).

of structure which they judged an unsuitable medium for what they wanted to say.³⁶ Hence those now demanding only "traditional" styles are, in fact, very untraditional. "Traditional" is, rightly, an impressive word. As such, however, it can be a tempting label for bolstering one's own position. But sometimes all it means is "what I am used to." It is, at any rate, certainly not synonymous with "repetitive."

ART MUST BE MODERN



PEAKING GENERALLY, Christian art, if it is to be truly traditional, must be modern; for all the great traditional styles were, each in its own period, modern. They spoke in vitally fresh forms to the men of their times. Put more pointedly, however, the difficulty is: Are not the forms, symbols, and theories of modern art too secularistic in inspiration to lend themselves to the expression of the supernatural truths of the Faith?

Only time and the craftsmanship of our artists will supply the ultimate answer. But history again has precedents which can throw light on this problem of adaptation. The early Christians, for example, did not hesitate to use the forms and techniques of the art of pagan Rome in the construction of their splendid basilicas. In the East, existing luxurious, even sensuous, idioms employed in the ateliers of the Levant were adapted by the architects of the Byzantine churches.³⁷ Surprisingly, symbols were even borrowed from ancient cults and mythologies. The lion as symbol of revivifying power and the frog as symbolizing eternal life were taken over by Christian artists from Egyptian hieroglyphics. The *putti* of classical mythology, later so common in Renaissance painting, are depicted in the catacombs of Cagliari fishing from a small boat, symbolizing fishers of souls.³⁸ Better known is the fable of the phoenix, which enjoyed widespread use as a type of immortality.³⁹ Later on, the

A CIBORIUM

The sacred function of a ciborium establishes it as one of those works of art on which the greatest possible skill in design and in execution should properly be exercised. We show here an example, recently made by Robert Clare of Boston, which seems unusually successful both as a conceptual and as a technical achievement.



Photo Erp



An interesting feature in the design is the way in which the problem of the handle of the lid has been solved. The familiar standing cross which serves both to mark the vessel as a Christian one and to enable the priest to remove and replace the cover, may be open to some objection. The cross makes, at once, a weak and easily bent handle, and must be, at the same time, a most uncomfortable one. Furthermore, it is usually better that an important symbol should stand on its symbolic dignity alone, without the addition of practical reasons for existence. In the vessel here shown, the cover is surmounted by a flat disk, strong and pleasant to the touch, which also serves as a foot when the cover is set down by itself. On this disk, the cross is engraved.

The form of cross chosen is a eucharistic one. One half of each arm of the cross is polished silver and the other half is cross-hatching which, in the course of time, will turn black. This white and black quartering stands for Life and Death, the fundamental principle that life can only come through death, possession through renunciation. "A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die, or else it remains nothing more than a grain of wheat; but if it dies, then it yields rich fruit." (John 12, 24.) This idea is so basic to the whole eucharistic conception, that it seems proper to give it expression in the way the engraver of this ciborium has here done.



IVORY RELIEF OF SECOND HALF OF 10TH CENTURY.

German or Italian work. Height $5\frac{1}{8}$ ".

The Emperor, Otto the First, is shown presenting a church (probably Magdeburg Cathedral) to Christ who blesses the gift. Christ appears as in judgment, throned on the heavenly wreath of victory, holding the book of records, and with the rainbow as his footstool.

The two other figures at the left are presumably the Emperor's sponsor and an angel. Opposite, at the right, stand St. Peter and two unidentified holy personages. The main figures are thus the Lord of Heaven, worshipped by Emperor and Pope, his vice-regents on earth.

The relief was originally one of a series which decorated the front of an altar. Its beauty seems due partly to the dignity and nobility of the formal conception, partly to the knowledge with which the precious material is handled, partly to the loving care with which the carving has been brought to completion, and to all these excellences in combination.

From the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, by courtesy of which it is here reproduced.

asymmetrical, restlessly coiling designs and grotesque fauna motifs of the ancient pagan Celts found themselves perfectly at home in the illuminations of the Book of Kells and in numerous Romanesque churches as far away as southalpine Italy.⁴⁰

TRADITIONAL USAGE

Traditional usage seen in the light of such precedents does not immediately prove that "modern" forms and theories *should* be used. It certainly does not show *how* they should be used. But it does throw considerable doubt on the "traditionalist" opinion that they should *not* be used. St. Bernard decried the use of sculpture and other "innovations," but Romanesque developed just the same. A short time later, southern Europeans would laughingly call the new art of the north "Gothic," because the word meant for them "barbarous," "crude." And had the artists listened to their critics, we would have neither Romanesque nor Gothic. Their genius lay in their ability to transform traditional doctrine into fresh symbols, meaningful to the men of their times. If the artist of today is to be traditional in this sense, if he is truly to teach, he can hardly be limited to the use of established forms in his attempt to depict the bearing of revealed truth on the welter of problems oppressing the modern world.

It is true that, as soon as Christian art, particularly liturgical art, becomes esoteric, its didactic loses the element of universality and to that extent is less Christian. At the same time, however, once it aims at simply becoming "popular," once it is content to give the people "what they like," it is betraying its mission. The people of Capharnaum did not like the doctrine of

the Real Presence, but our Lord let the people go, not the doctrine.⁴¹ There is such a thing as heretical art; and the artist, if he, too, is to teach, must be governed by objective truth, not by popular demand. He must come down to the people, but only to raise them above themselves. If the popular norm of "good art" is that which most closely approaches the verisimilitude of the color photograph, he will try to educate them to something better. No matter how great the demand for dewy-eyed statues of the saints, the craftsman of integrity will refuse to turn out these dismal, foppish parodies of Christian sanctity, and the conscientious pastor will refuse them a place in his church.

Let us take another brief look at the past, if only to dispel the notion that abstraction and distortion are a sort of two-headed monster spawned in our own decadent age by "arty" charlatans too effete for honest productivity. To choose but one conspicuous example, the major Christian architectural systems are, in the last analysis, highly subtle abstract forms for the expression of a religious idea. Romanesque structural design, for example, gave way to Gothic not simply because a "new aesthetic" or advanced building techniques had developed, but because the simpler lines and restrained proportions of the earlier style were inadequate for the more complex theological conceptions of the later architects. Romanesque simplicity breathes the mysticism of early western monasticism. Gothic unity in multiplicity represents the meaningful concord of all things in the eternal plan of God's providence. Romanesque, like a strong surge of devotional prayer, leads to God immediately. Gothic, the visual counterpart of the moderate realism of 13th century theologians, points to God mediately, through the wondrous variety of God's creation and redemptive providence.⁴²

But how many of the faithful of those past ages could analyze the delicate didactic of those abstract structural forms? Yet the

⁴⁰ E.g., the chimeric figures on the bronze doors of the church of St. Zeno in Verona. This widespread use of fantastic iconography, as also the gargoyles of the Gothic period, are ample testimony that even the grotesque is nothing new to the tradition of Christian art.

⁴¹ Jn. 6:26-27.

message was no less telling, even if only unconsciously perceived. Christian art can often be bluntly clear;⁴³ but if it is to be faithful to its calling, it must often be subtle—as subtle as the inspiring cadences of liturgical chant. For Christian truth is essentially mysterious, seen now as a “confused reflection in a mirror.”⁴⁴ It is pre-eminently here, in the realm of Christian mysteries, that the artist—painter, sculptor, poet, or musician—can say something beyond the competency of the more precise, articulate propositions of the theologian.⁴⁵ But what is it that he says! As well ask: what does the sung *Exultet* say that the recited *exultet* does not? What does St. Thomas say with his poems on the Eucharist that he does not say in his scholarly treatise on that mystery? What do Giotto’s frescoes say about the Franciscan ideal that is not found in the words of the Poverello himself? Analysis can only go so far here. Complete clarity in Christian art would belie the essential mysteriousness of Christian truth.

A MATERIALISTIC NORM

Much the same is true as regards “distortion.” It is safe to say that worthwhile Christian art of the past affords far more examples of distortion in perspective, anatomy and landscape than of “realistic” representational style. To regard these merely as crude examples of careless technique or unskilled draftsmanship is impos-

⁴²The simpler, unfigured Romanesque façade did not deter the viewer, but allowed him to pass directly within, where the horizontal axis, emphasized by the unvaried series of columns flanking the nave, drew the eye immediately to the altar, the visible symbol of God’s presence. But the Gothic façade and porches, with their sculptured world in miniature, hold the viewer’s attention. Then the interior, with its soaring vertical axis, draws the eye upwards and along past a profusion of images in stone and colored glass, and only then, finally, to the altar. Both conceptions are thoroughly Christian. Philosophically, both find justification in the doctrine of the analogy of being. Cf. Morey, *Christian Art*, pp. 42-49.

sible in the light of historical research.⁴⁶ Types of distortion are so common that even representative examples can hardly be given here. This should not be surprising if we are to look for meaning in a Christian work of art; for, after all, the spiritual world of reality seen by the eye



of faith can hardly be truly represented by the material world as seen by the naked eye. To follow such a materialistic norm, to rule out all abstraction and distortion because “things don’t look like that,” is itself a most pernicious kind of distortion; for it is a crass debasement of the spiritual element essential to Christian teaching.

⁴³As, for example, the frequent representations of scenes from the Old and New Testaments, or the vitally sculptured “moral” medallions, in which the virtues are graphically represented in juxtaposition to the opposed vice.

⁴⁴I Cor. 13:12.

⁴⁵“Thanks to its subtlety and refinement, art—whether heard or seen—reaches depths in the mind and heart . . . which words, either spoken or written, with their insufficiently shaded analytical precision, cannot attain” (Pius XII, in an address to the First International Congress of Catholic Artists, Sept. 5, 1950; cf. *Liturgical Arts*, Nov., 1950, p. 3).

⁴⁶Cf. Lützel, *op. cit.*, p. 27. This is not to deny, of course, that the past affords numerous examples of inept workmanship.

It is, at the same time, a rejection of most of what is good in the Christian art of the past.

For many modern artists, self-expression has become the be-all and end-all of artistic activity, a god both absolute and vacillating. Purely personal intuitions, transient emotional flashes, these are the stuff from which inspiration springs. And if the resultant artifact is utterly unintelligible to anyone else, that is unimportant.

This should not be surprising. It is but the visual parallel of current idealistic philosophies. But it is disturbing that this fickle idol should gain even a tiny niche in the temple of the Eternal God. The incongruity should be obvious. Art simply for art's sake, or for the artists, can have

no real place here.⁴⁷

The artist with his sensitive perceptivity and expressive techniques, is, of course, extremely important. It is he alone who is equipped to effect that marvelous transformation of spiritual truth into material symbol, to keep fresh and vital the God-given didactic of the visual. Moses still needs Beseleel. Yet the artist, if he is to teach, is important as a means, not as an end. His work must point to God, not to himself. But if he is genuinely inspired by Christian truth, there will be no problem. Once he has grasped the sublimity of the Creed, once he has realized that it is now "not I," but "Christ that lives in me,"⁴⁸ he will spurn mere self-expression as a puny thing.

⁴⁷One of the conditions for the use of "modern art" in the churches is: "... the needs of the Christian community are taken into consideration rather than the particular taste or talent of the individual artist" (*Mediator Dei*, n. 195). This no more implies a suppression of the personal, subjective aspect of the activity of the artist than the demands of the Christian life have meant the extirpation of the personalities of the saints. In the fullest sense, Christian artistic activity is a profound, even mystical, subjective response to two objective realities: Christian truth, and those to whom that truth is to be communicated. The great antagonist of Iconoclasm, St. John Damascene, commenting on Our Lord's words, "Blessed are your eyes, for they have sight; blessed are your ears, for they have hearing" (Mt. 13:16), clearly indicates this twofold objectivity: "[The Apostles] saw Christ face to face, since he was bodily present. But since he is not present to us in the body, we hear his words from books, and are sanctified. . . . In like manner, through the language of images, we see a representation of his bodily form and of his miracles and sufferings, and thereby advance in holiness. . . . For since . . . our soul does not stand alone, but is hidden, as it were, by a veil, we cannot arrive at spiritual truths except by means of corporeal things. Consequently, as we hear physical words with material ears and come to understand the spiritual, so by contemplating material things we attain to contemplation of the spiritual" (*De imaginibus oratio* III [PG, XCIV, 1333 D]).

⁴⁸Gal. 2:20.



Every beautiful thing in this world — the hyssop in the wall and the cedar of Lebanon, Solomon in all his glory and the ring on his finger — carries with it a joy and wonder of the life that is ours, and gratitude to the Maker of all. — Walter de la Mare.

SYMPOSIUM

ON A JUST WAGE FOR ARTISTS

"For the past five years, I have been doing free lance work in religious sculpture, and occasionally in illustration. Because my work has been well received, I have been encouraged to offer my work for sale through dealers who have a discriminating clientele. What remuneration can I expect for my work? What proportion of this should rightly be shared with the dealer who introduces my work to potential buyers?" — P.A.

I

Obviously, one just doesn't price statues like sausages! And time studies, cost accounts' figures, and the like would reveal that most original works are vastly under-priced. This is a perennial problem — we have it all the time. The artist produces a work and then is at a loss to know how to price it. Moreover, the artist often fails to realize that the dealer has to meet rent, light, heat, and salaries, and that these come in for some fair share of the final price. This is unquestionably a delicate area of interpretation. It is not easy to say what a fair mark-up is, because, while the dealer would be radiantly happy with 50% for mass produced articles, this would be unfair for a single piece from an individual artist. It is my opinion that 30% would be a workable arrangement, and would not place the piece beyond the price range of any buyer. And after all, the object of the artist and dealer, in this case, is to see that the work of art finds a proper buyer!

Nina Polcyn

*St. Benet Library and Bookshop
Chicago, Illinois.*

2

I suppose I am too much involved in your problem and too sympathetic to your need to answer your query properly. I am a dealer in "culture" — books, records, and, sometimes, prints and pictures. I agree firmly with the often repeated definition of art: right reason in making things. I

also strongly maintain that right reason should be called upon to reimburse the artist for his work.

For ten years I have discussed this real but complicated problem with the artists and teachers of art that I know, in and out of the Catholic Art Association, and sometimes with patrons. Naturally, I think the most efficient method of placing works of art with the buyer is by way of the middleman — the dealer. This middleman of works of art must be a most accomplished merchant. He must know how to discover that rare phenomenon, the patron of art, and then he must convince him that he should buy original creative work and not the trash that he and his dear old mother are familiar with. The dealer must also know where to find the proper artist to fulfill the commission he has secured. He must also be able to determine a fair price for this work of art he has sold, so that (a) the patron receives his money's worth; (b) the artist gets a fair return for the use of his skill, his mental effort, his material, and his time; and (c) the dealer receives a fee sufficient to repay him for his enterprise. Upon consideration, the dealer is such a rare combination of art critic, psychologist, and business-man that he is as rare as is the generous patron and the genuine artist.

This is, indeed, a problem that one could spend, as I have, ten years considering, and have no pat answer to it. In the meantime, I have secured a few commissions. On these I have tried to set a price

that is equitable to the customer, and which will give the artist his share—usually two-thirds of the sale price. But this method of price fixing, while operating under the old law of supply and demand, is so indefinite that it will vary in each case. I think that the best plan is to work through a dealer whom one can trust—on condition that he can measure up to the difficult qualifications that I have mentioned. In this way, it is easier to find customers and they are better satisfied to deal with the matter in established, business-like ways. Also, the artist is freed from bothersome, tiresome details and the time and worry he saves will be more than made up by the commission he pays the middleman.

*John B. Shaw
Tulsa Book and Record Shop
Tulsa, Oklahoma.*

3

In appraising this question in the light of "what proportion should rightly be shared with the dealer who introduces my work," we should not think in terms of "introducing" the work, but in terms of what overhead the dealer has to keep up in order to make his place available and known to potential buyers. It must be considered that he, also, has to make a living.

Since Carillon Press handles only works of art (for greeting cards) that are to be reproduced in quantity, I am not equipped to answer the exact question given. The financial relationship between the processor and artist, is best solved in the matter of greeting cards, on the basis of royalty. This arrangement exists in the fields of literature and music and is evidently well liked by people in those fields. We might also mention that we show the artist's name on all reproductions of his work, believing that public recognition is part of his "stock in trade."

One common error is the assertion that the highest form in which a work of art

can be produced is that by which only one original is marketed and no reproductions are made. It is a snobbish outlook and not in accordance with the facts of life, nor with the teaching of the Church which fosters participation and assistance to all technological developments which help to elevate the lot of man.

The Church was quick to capitalize on the invention of printing to assist in spreading the message of the Gospels. Food which comes from the hand of God is produced and reproduced countless numbers of times. The quality of the original and the skill of the craftsman-reproducer are what count. There is nothing wrong with the principle of reproduction. Christ had pity on the multitude and multiplied the loaves and fishes.

If artists of Catholic outlook were to share in this care for their fellow men (and their fellow men's pocketbooks), they might find their work and thought making more of an impact than they now do.

This has a direct relation to the remuneration which an artist would receive from any given piece of work. No author or composer could live on the income provided from one original manuscript and whatever limited circulation could be made of it. In the days before mass production (I can see shivers going up and down the spines of some at the mere mention of those words), that was all that was available. Many artists still persist in living in the atmosphere of those bygone ages, and feel "out of things." But God put them in *this* age—and as Maurice Lavanoux remarked, "In yearning for a bygone age, we find fault with our Creator who put us on this earth here and now." God expects us to do our part in this day and age. Holy Mother Church is continuously exhorting us to this. St. Augustine said "Difficult times, frightening times, men say. But the times are ourselves! We are what our times are."

For an artist to be true to his art, he must reflect the age in which he lives. He

could not truly do otherwise. One of the aspects of this age is the wider distribution of the cultural things of life. Music and literature are available through mass production techniques. Why not other forms of art?

Something is to be said here about the social responsibility of the processor. He has his responsibilities, one of which is not to glut the market with cheap imitations of a good thing. There is always that danger. For an artist to benefit from modern mass production methods and for modern mass production methods to benefit from his art, the two must get together. The artist must investigate the new methods and adapt his techniques accordingly. He should initiate some new ones if need be. Who could be better adapted than the artist to bring out the possibilities of beauty inherent in some of our modern materials? The reputations of many of the old masters were enhanced by their use of oils and pigments to produce the effects they wanted. They developed techniques beyond those in which they first practiced their art. They showed no hesitancy in doing this.

Then, too, the modern artist needs a little patience. Just because the processor turns up his nose at some of the work offered him and says he can't use it because it won't sell, the artist shouldn't immediately turn his back in disgust and have nothing more to do with those fields. How about simplifying his approach? How about trying to see the other fellow's viewpoint? How about getting down off his high horse, and acknowledging that perhaps he hasn't made the message of his work of art too clear? Too many of our modern artists turn out something in a hurry, perhaps as a matter of momentary inspiration, and think it should be hailed at once as a masterpiece. Technique and finish are still called for — and patience. Patience in perfecting technique and patience in trying to be so clear in their own thoughts as to what they are trying to say,

that those thoughts will communicate themselves to others. They will dominate and shine through the medium of expression.

The artist must make himself part of today's living. Cardinal Gracias has said that "no one can sanctify himself, much less sanctify others, by a mystical escape from the social order." That applies to artists no less than to other people. It might be well if, before straining for the heights, we use our talents humbly in the service of others, depending upon God's grace and our coöperation with it, to develop our means of expression through inward growth so that our outward forms of expression are sincere, straightforward, and partake of something of what God wants to say through us. This might call for much self-examination but might result in artists having more of an impact on the daily life around them, and in making that impact, they might actually be remunerated for it!

Catherine Buehler
Carillon Press
New York, N. Y.

4

Mr. Demers wrote an answer to the question of this symposium, but did not submit it because he was "a little dismayed at its severity and the lack of satisfaction it might have for those hard workers who are trying to support themselves on their sale of works of art."

We quote here an excerpt from his letter to the editor:

I have sold few things and have been accused by others of selling too cheaply. I am firmly convinced, however, that the *price* of artifacts will never be in conformity with their *worth* — that the price they bring is governed by the old law of supply and demand which is entirely beyond the control of the artist. The respect which is said to result from the high price artists insist upon for their work is not necessarily the kind of respect the artist wants

or needs. As long as there is little demand and a lack of *true* love for the beautiful, the artist will have to do with what is offered, even though that be too little. He is obliged at all times, however, to give his best to the work and the suitable eval-

uation of this is incomputable (or really irrelevant to the artist and his art).

Edmund Demers
Professor of Art, Clark College
Dubuque, Iowa

ON PROFESSIONAL ART: A REPORT

The panel discussions of the professional artists held during the 1954 National Convention at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, brought forth much interesting comment that ought to be made available to every member of the Association. To my knowledge, it was the largest group of practicing and teaching artists to gather at a C.A.A. Convention, and they were joined by a number of interested dealers. Some of their decisions should bear fruit for sacred art in America.

Miss Adé Bethune and I compared notes on the panels. It seems to us unwise to report every detail, or to report matters in the order they were discussed. The general conclusions, however, should stimulate our united efforts during the forthcoming years. We can summarize these conclusions in a ten-point resumé as follows:

1. There is a definite need for salable, original works of religious art today, and there is a definite demand for these works.

This was a point proven by the individual dealers at the meeting. The word "salable" does not mean *popular* in treatment. The panel spoke of real works of art, well-made, of quality and good design.

2. Selling this work at its true value is a problem. Dealers and artists are at variance in this regard. The dealers want a greater percentage of profit than they are getting. The artists say they are not getting enough for what the work, their time and talent warrant.

3. The buying public does not realize what is involved in creating a hand-made work of art. Buyers must be educated to

realize the permanent value and worth of original works of art. They must understand that these things inevitably cost more, and why this is so.

We hope, in time, to persuade several of our C.A.A. writers to explain and develop this statement, for publication, and to persuade dealers and others to make known these writings, to educate the buying public.

4. It may be necessary to seek other avenues of sale for genuine religious art than the church goods dealers, in places where the overhead and other expenses are not so high. Schools where good work is produced, for instance, might offer for sale attractive works by students who are willing to sell. Works shown at these Conventions could also be offered for sale.

5. When good work is being shown anywhere, local C.A.A. members could inform pastors and clergy so that they may know and recommend the dealers displaying the work or the artists producing it.

The panel made this recommendation because the clergy will usually recommend the local church goods dealer as a source of religious art, whereas there are possibly no works of art worthy of the name in the place.

6. Many Catholics do not know where they can buy good work, either in their own towns or elsewhere. C.A.A. members should seize every opportunity to inform as many people as possible where there is good work to be had.

7. Our own Travelling Exhibitions have not been put to much use. It was sug-

gested that the Exhibition Chairman get a definite price placed on each painting, drawing, and sculpture in the general exhibition if the pieces are for sale. Each member of the panel was urged to contact dealers and others in his own town, and try to interest more people in putting on an exhibition of this C.A.A. work. These works are our own choices of *good* craftsmanship. They should be eminently salable.

8. Much work goes into assembling and presenting the art exhibition at each C.A.A. convention. The panel suggests that it might be kept together, and shown at several other large gatherings or conventions before being dismantled. This work, too, could be priced.

9. Another fine exhibition, the Christocentric Arts Festival, is put together by the Newman Club of the University of Illinois for a few weeks each year. The panel suggests that this group of works be kept together, and sent to a number of institutions to be seen by more people.

10. A very promising suggestion was offered by Mrs. Berger. Each year, the Family Life Conference, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, the Liturgical Week convention, and other such groups have had little exhibition material to show the public. She thought the material at the C.A.A. convention far superior to all that was assembled at these other larger conventions. She suggested that we offer an exhibition of our C.A.A. works in connection with all these conventions hereafter, and offered personally to attend to the matter.

Few gatherings of artists seemed so vitally interested, well informed, and willingly helpful as this fine group at "The Woods." We all felt a decided lift as a result of our sessions. We want the other members of our Catholic Art Association to share our findings, and to help in whatever way they can to further the interests of sacred art in America.

Rev. Anthony Lauck, C.S.C.

Miss Adé Bethune

ICONS - - A GREAT CHRISTIAN ART

We hear a great deal today about the quality and artistic value of the statues and pictures in our churches. Some say that old familiar statues are simpering, sugary, or "precious," with a huge dollop of sentimentality. The defenders call "modern" statues grotesque and un-Christian. There is one kind of religious art, however, which has never been challenged. It is the icon of the Eastern churches.

By Brother Franciscus Willett, C.S.C.

The Eastern rites differ in many ways from the Western modes of worship. The Mass is celebrated with different ceremonies and in different languages. The devotional life of the people is vastly different. Yet people who worship in these rites are as Catholic as the Pope whom they acknowledge as their Spiritual Father. Since the Church is for all men she allows great variety in unessentials while insisting on purity of dogma. The various rites show the great fecundity of the Church and the marvelous freedom she permits

her children.

The special development of the Eastern rites in church art is the icon, a Greek word meaning "image." When we enter an Eastern church, even one in the United States, we are struck by the absence of statues. Instead we see a multitude of paintings hanging everywhere. They are generally small, being one or two feet in their largest dimension. As we study the painting, we see in it an unearthly quality. This is the icon.

The icon plays an important part in the religious life of Eastern churches. Homes have a corner reserved for the icon, before which a light burns. The picture is covered

Metal crucifix.
Repoussé work finished
by chasing from the front.
Notice the sloping foot rest
which is traditional in
Eastern churches.



Mother and Child.
16th century.
Christ's halo bears an O, vestige
of the Greek trigramaton
meaning: I AM WHO AM.

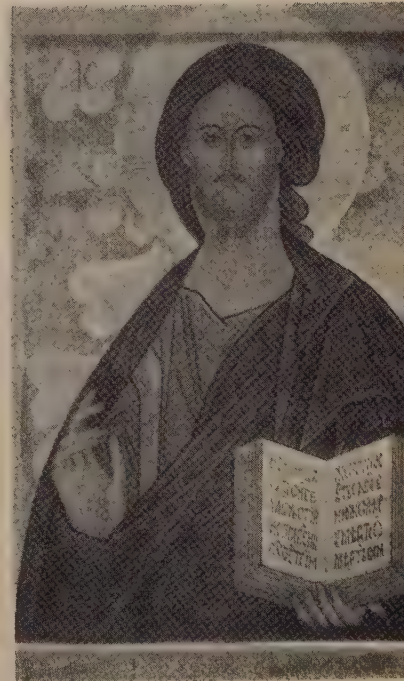
RUSSIAN ICONS



The Archangel Michael,
armed with spear
thin as a sun ray.
15th century.



Christ as Judge.
School of Moscow,
15th century.





PARAPHRASE

HAIL TO THEE BEATRICIAN, UNFALLEN;
WITH THE GARDENER STILL FREE IN THE GARDEN;
OF ALL DAUGHTERS OF EVE THE EXEMPLAR;
AND OF ADAM THE SECOND, THE MOTHER.

HALLOWED VESSEL OF BOUNDLESSNESS BOUNDED;
FOR US, BLIND AND REBELLIOUS, BESEECH HIM;
IN TIME'S ONLY REAL MOMENT, BESEECH HIM;
AS TIME COMES TO ITS ENDING, BESEECH HIM.

in reverence except for those times when it is used for prayer. A special feature of Eastern Church architecture is the iconostasis, a screen which separates the altar from the body of the church, and which is covered with paintings. During the Mass the screen and other icons are incensed as part of the ceremonial. The reason for this reverence is that these paintings are a form of sacramental. The Eastern mind never regards holy things lightly.

The icon was once the basis of a heresy and a persecution of tremendous proportions. During the 8th century there sprang up a group in Constantinople which held that all images were sinful. They suited action to word, burning thousands of icons and killing those who defended their use. These men, known as iconoclasts, or "image-breakers," were finally condemned by a council of the church, and the cult of images was approved and praised. The Eastern churches celebrate a special feast commemorating the overthrow of the iconoclasts.

The purpose of Christian painting, whether East or West, is the raising of the soul to God in prayer. It needs to be artistically good to catch the element of spirituality in its pure state, avoiding worldliness, sentimentality, or any distortion of spiritual truth. The painters of icons have always kept this principle firmly in mind. Their paintings are doorways to God, not resting places in themselves. They are never purely realistic, always somewhat symbolic. Because of this quality, they are useful not only as stimuli to prayer but also as textbooks of religion.

Leontius, bishop of Neapolis in the 8th century, writes of icons, "The images are the textbooks always open, which are venerated and explained in church. What writing is for the scholar the image is for the illiterate. It is of use even for the intellectual." Earlier, St. Basil the Great noted, "The painted images of a truth render this truth more accessible to the mind." Thus

icons have nobly served Eastern churches from the early days of Christianity up to the present time.

The Christian art of the West, though admirable in its finest examples, has taken several false turns, until today there is some question as to where we are going. There is even serious discussion as to what religious art is. Our difficulty seems to begin with painters who dramatized their subject, appealing to human rather than divine values. Before the 13th century, Jesus, Our Lady, and the Saints were portrayed in full face. There was no drama here. The picture seemed to gaze at the beholder and capture his attention, only to release it to God in prayer. In the 12th and 13th centuries, pictures began to be painted in profile. Luke, bishop of Tuys in Spain, denounced what he called "one-eyed Virgins," or paintings of Our Lady in profile. The next step was the portrayal of action, or human feeling, and the beholder became a spectator at a drama rather than a worshiper. Most Western religious art today, even the best, still displays that flair for drama which is essentially opposed to prayer.

Eastern art was never troubled by this development. The icons painted today still are faced squarely towards the worshiper. No human emotions are to be seen; everything is idealized. No distracting element of the merely human or earthly is in these paintings. For this reason, they are perfect instruments of prayer, perfect examples of religious art.

For centuries icons were painted only for use in churches, never for individuals. So great was the devotion of the painters to their sacred function that they remained anonymous. The painting of images has always been strictly supervised by the bishops, and has been kept under the control of the Church. A synod of the Russian church in the 16th century laid down a set of rules for iconographers, or image painters, in a book known as the *Staglov*. In it

we read, "The art of painting the image of God should not be entrusted to him that disgraces it. It must not be that the painter's lack of skill be an offense to God. Even though the painter be judged capable of painting icons, if he does not lead a pious life he must not be permitted to paint."

The *Staglov* outlines the training of a painter. He must practice free hand drawing until he has sufficient skill. Then he must learn the rules of icon painting, from a study of good examples in churches and from the advice of a good master. He should pray so that his soul is permeated with God. Before painting, he is instructed to seek the blessing of a priest, who invokes God's aid with the following prayer. "O You Who have so wonderfully imprinted Your features on the cloth sent to King Algar of Edessa, Who has so admirably inspired the Evangelist Luke, enlighten my soul, and that of Your servant; lead his hand, so that he may perfectly delineate Your features, those of the Blessed Virgin, and those of the saints, for the glory and the peace of Holy Church."

The painting is done on a board of pine or cypress about a quarter of an inch thick, prepared with a coating of lime and glue. The paints are formed by mixing pigments with egg yolks. The major features of head and clothing are sketched in, then painted. The figures are usually painted in full face, or three-quarters face, profile being rarely used. All perspective is carefully avoided, and the features are impersonal and abstract. The finished painting is the essence of simplicity.

Many icons are highly symbolic. A painting of the Blessed Virgin shows her with her arms raised in prayer. In a circle of gold on her breast is portrayed the Christ-child offering his Body and Blood in the Holy Sacrament. We are reminded of that deeply theological prayer which begins, "Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in your servants."

A painting of Christ's Ascension will have the garments of Jesus overlaid with gold leaf, symbol of his divinity. An icon portraying the crucifixion will lack all signs of divinity, stressing his suffering Humanity. Where Christ is portrayed in an icon, the luminosity of all other figures will come from that of the central figure.

So great was the reverence for icons in the 16th century that it became customary to overlay them with sheets of gold and silver, covering all portions except the features and hands. Of course, this hides all the beauty of the icon. Fortunately, all of them are not so covered. The true magnificence of their art will not be fully appreciated until these metal coverings are removed.

It is not to be expected that the West should adopt the icon for its own. The art of a people grows from its character, genius, and history, and so fulfills the needs of the people who use it. No borrowed art can fulfill this function, no matter how perfect it may be. Yet much can be learned from the study of iconography that may be applicable to Western religious painting, for here is an art that is strong and true and spiritual.



BOOK REVIEW

COVARRUBIAS, MIGUEL

The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. 319 pp., 12 color plates, 112 illustrations, 48 photographs, \$15.00.

This is a most beautiful and valuable book, as well for the general reader who happens to be interested in Indians, as for the art student or the artist. First of all, the way in which the book is illustrated is itself an object lesson. There are black and white drawings, full page color paintings, and photographs printed by themselves in an "album" at the end. Obviously, the photographs are dispassionate records of the appearance of the objects represented, but the drawings and paintings are something entirely different. These are studies, many of them intensely sensitive, not of the appearance, but of the essential nature of the things shown. They are unusually fine formal representations and, by the well-known paradox, give a more powerful impression of reality, simply because they are more real, less concerned with shadows and more with substance, than photographic or naturalistic studies of the same objects would be. Incidentally, and only incidentally, these representations are far more beautiful than the photographs, for they have their own beauty as well as that which is a reflection of the beauty of the original artifact.

But our main concern here is not with the excellence of Mr. Covarrubias as a painter, but with what can be learned from a study of the objects he painted. We have a perfect right to ask ourselves just what is the use of studying things produced in cultures so different from our own. It is the same question that is often asked with regard to museums — museums of art or of anthropology. It is a good straight question, and deserves a clear answer. We believe that the answer is this.

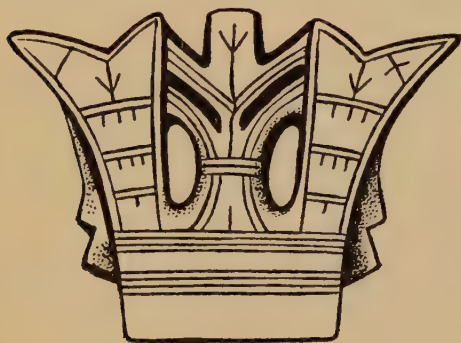
A good museum is of value to the student of art because it is both a great storehouse of material things and at the same time a great storehouse of patterned things. For any work of art is a quantity of material which has received a pattern, and wherever objects from other cultures may be seen, the way in which material and pattern have been combined may be studied. The materials are objectively there on the museum shelves, and await our investigation. The images to which they have been formed are also there, for our admiration.

But material and formal image do not exhaust the components of any artificial thing. To its production also went the various *means* that the shaping process employed, and the useful *purpose* to which it was directed. But these two additional elements, the means and the end, are no longer part of the object once it is made, and we can only judge them from knowledge which we bring with us to the museum. For example, we may see a bronze figure of Apollo. We see bronze with our eyes and Apollo with our intellect; but we do not see, simply because they are not there, either the Greek foundry with all its equipment and its craftsmen, nor the Greek temple with its worshipers and the rites in which the statue fulfilled its end. If we want to know about these instrumental and purposive elements we must go not to the museum, but must look into our own minds for any such knowledge. If we have had experience of foundry work, if we have ourselves been foundrymen, we will understand much about the bronze Apollo that would be hidden from us without that experience, and in the same way, if we have a personal experience of religion, there will be aspects of an object of religion which will be clear to us, but obscure to the man to whom religion is a sentimental illusion. In the museum

the materials and the forms are actually present, whereas the means and the purposes of the production are not present, and we must supply them.

Of course, a book like this differs from a museum in that the actual materials are not in the book as they are on the exhibition shelves, but this is, perhaps, an academic objection. As a practical matter, the illustrations are so given that much may be learned from them about the Indians' use of matter.

Indian art, like the art of all primitives, indeed like the art of all traditional peoples however simple or complex their cultures,



is dominated by a notion which today we find difficult to accept, or even to understand. To the Indian, an artificial object has not only a clear and definable function, but it has also something to say about itself and about its function. This message is the source of any elaboration or enrichment which we would call ornamental. With the traditionalist there is probably very little ornament which is not a form of speech, a rhetorical means to a rhetorical end. As traditional artists, we assume that this notion of the primacy of the decorative idea is true, and that it is a key to the comprehension of all normal art. The normal artist does not conceive of decoration as the elaboration of an appearance to be viewed, but as an idea to be understood. From this general principle follows all that we have to say about the lessons to be learned from this book. First, regarding materials. How can we profit from know-

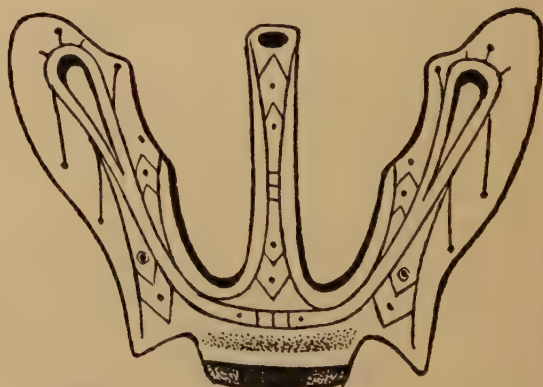
ing how these Indians chose and handled their media?

It is obvious that our aborigines lived "close to nature," as a part of the natural world which we tend to regard as a quarry of raw materials to be exploited, rather than as a house to be inhabited. The savage felt himself to be a part of nature, and not necessarily the most important part. He therefore knew much more than we do about natural things, and he tended to regard them with friendly feelings, often



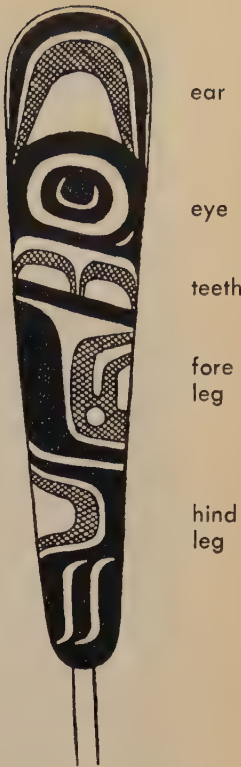
touched with love and awe.

This attitude toward nature affected his attitude toward his artistic materials, which were drawn from nature. It led him to retain, other things being equal, as much as he could of the natural and existing shape of the piece of matter which he used, whether that was a stone boulder, the trunk of a giant cedar or the pelvis of a seal, and to modify that shape as little as possible. To him the natural shape of the stone, the tree or the bone already meant something, and that meaning was to be conserved and developed rather than destroyed. The ultimate shape was, therefore, a blending of two dominant ideas,

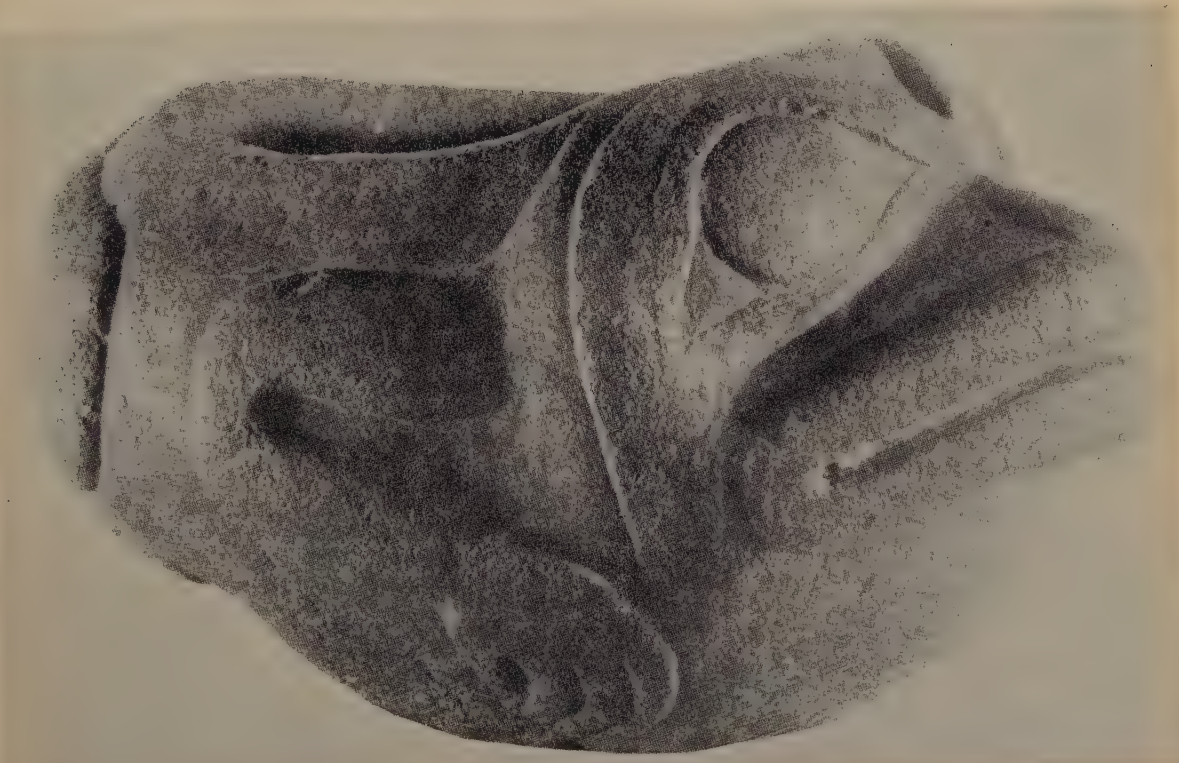
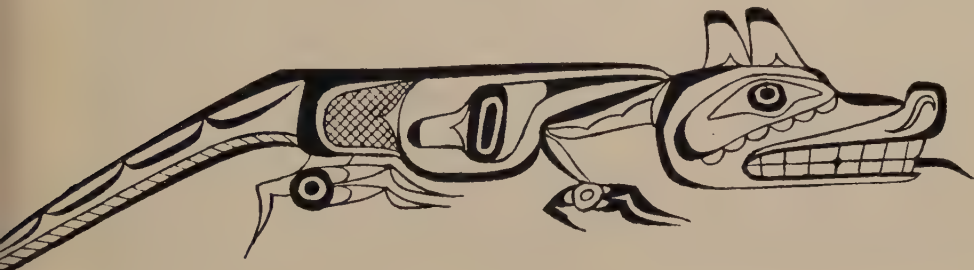


Illustrations, TOP RIGHT: Harpoon head, Cape Kialegah, St. Lawrence Island; LEFT AND LOWER RIGHT: winged objects from Panuk Islands.

Right:
 End of wooden berry-spoon painted to represent a bear. Northwest Coast culture. Here identification of the animal is not achieved by means of "the significant profile," but by means of a combination of specific organs, organs characteristic of the species bear. An ear, an eye, teeth, and legs, each conventionally bear-ish, are combined into a heraldic statement of great succinctness.



Below:
 Somewhat less abstract is the wolf below, in which facial bones, humerus, and pelvic bones are used to establish the identity of the animal.
 We are familiar with the application of the same principle to animal forms, such as eagles and lions, in our own medieval heraldry, though familiarity has robbed them of their strangeness.



Kwakiutl stone bowl in the shape of a frog.



Hand-shaped ornament cut out of mica, Hopewell Mounds, Ohio, 24 centimeters high.

and any amount of what we call "distortion" was acceptable to him as long as these ideas and their combination were clearly expressed. The stone bowl in the shape of a frog (see page 97) is not a stone bowl, but a stone which is to be *used* as a bowl and to express the idea for which the frog stands. It is *a stone*, treated in a certain way for certain sufficient reasons. And a totem pole is not a series of heraldic animals "made of wood," but is *a great tree*, with all the meaning and mystery of such a tree, to which have been added forms which express certain important social facts. And the pelvis is not just so much bone, which might as well have been so much celluloid if that material had been available, but is a bone of a special significance to men of a culture obsessed with ideas of fertility, and aware that their lives depended on the animals that inhabit the sea.

It might be objected that the Indians left the beach stone, the tree trunk, and the pelvis much as they were merely because it was easier with the crude tools at their disposal. There is some truth in such an observation, but it explains only a small part of the facts. Reverence for the objects of the natural world in which they lived is a factor of greater importance and interest.

The mental images to which the materials are formed present a similar lesson. If the primary purpose of shaping any natural object is the presentation of the idea that object stands for — whether eagle, jaguar or serpent — then this object, and every one of its parts, must be presented in its most characteristic aspect. In general, the most characteristic aspect of a thing is its profile, and the most characteristic of its various profiles is that which tells us most about its nature and its modes of action. Since the Renaissance, and particularly since the popularizing of photography, we have lost this heraldic sense of artistic presentation, which we

tend to associate with ignorance and technical ineptitude. We seem to have become less interested in things, and in the permanent meanings and natures of things, than in their aspects — momentary aspects in the flux of temporal change, spatial aspects taken from one particular point in space. To most of us, the Egyptian canon of the human figure still looks odd, though it is a carefully reasoned combination of significant profiles, which has far more expressive power than any chance combination of foreshortenings. This is the application of the primacy of idea to the field of image or form. To express the idea of a hand most clearly, the most significant projection of the hand was chosen. The mica hand on page 98 is a fine heraldic example.

We have been led, by the ideas of our particular epoch, to think of drawing as determined by the accidents of time and space, to use vanishing point perspective, foreshortening, angle shots. These things have their values, but they are not the tools of a man who is trying to make something. His graphic tools are the outline drawing and its development in the template. If you are a potter, and want to see how other potters have solved their problems, go to the museum and draw, but let your drawings be accurate, measured, full size records of outlines. If you are a glass designer, go and make drawings of bottles and vases, exact, painfully precise records of outlines. Both in the drawings you make on paper and in the reflections of them which you keep in your memory, you will have the facts that you are concerned with. You will also be thinking in the same way as the makers of the objects you are studying. The same advice applies to any kind of construction. Does the architect give his builders rendered perspective drawings to build by? He gives them projections, plans, sections and templates, for only so can his ideas be transmitted to them accurately. He reserves his rendered

perspectives to his unfortunate client, well aware of the truth of the cynical adage: "A snappy drawing means a bad building."

To sum up then, this book will be of great value to students if they know what to look for. The important lessons are those of the relationship of ideas to decora-

tion, the use of simple materials, and the value of the significant profile. There is, of course, much beside, but if these lessons can be well learned, a sound artistic lifetime of work can be founded on them.

—John Howard Benson
Graham Carey

ON DRESS

That one's dress is a symbol of one's ideas of oneself and one's place in the universe is not a pious wish. I am not saying that we *ought* to dress in such a way as to reflect ourselves. Dress actually *is* a symbol—good or bad. Right now, our clothing *is* symbolic, and it is thus a useful gauge by which we may know what minds we do, indeed, have. In the long run we get what we collectively deserve in the way of culture and cultural things. Men of intelligence and free will build the kind of civilization that they basically want. If men are, in general, dissatisfied with what they have built, it is because something has gone wrong with their intelligence or with their will or with both, and this is the same thing as saying that they have lapsed from full humanity, for intelligence and free will are the faculties that distinguish men from apes.

Most of those who hope to restore their status as members of a real Christian culture are definitely dissatisfied with the urban culture we have heretofore built. They cannot see it as a Christian culture at all, but as a secular culture in which Christians by the grace of God still manage precariously to maintain their Christianity. Most of us believe that things have come to such a pass that the hope of true Christian culture lies in beginning all over again in the country, and in slowly building there the foundations upon which a true culture might eventually grow. We must begin as far as possible, and in a spiritual air as free as possible, from the

deadly influences that have wrecked our old culture.

But just living in the country is of no good in itself. If our minds are dominated by city ideas of time and of work, of money values as primary, of power and thrill as ends, of the things we make as ephemeral means to ephemeral satisfactions, rather than as lasting tools for the winning of Eternal Life, then we live in the country in vain. Our minds are still enslaved by the baneful errors of Babylon. Our attitude toward industrialism and its products is a clue to our understanding of the problem. And our ideas about clothes are clear signs of what we really think of industrialism. If we think of the factory as the normal source of clothes and materials, if we think of the fashion magazine as the normal source of ideas of how clothes should be designed, if the movies give us our notions of why clothes should be worn, if we envisage a new suit or a half a dozen new dresses a year, to be worn until out of style and then thrown away, if our attitude to our neighborhood is centrifugal, always looking *away* from it to somewhere else, and away from ourselves to somebody else, as sources of cultural values, then we will be on the side of the enemy in the last desperate battle for a Christian culture.

To build a genuine Christian civilization here today, we must be actuated by the principles that have informed genuine civilizations whenever and wherever they have appeared. We must be willing to apply religion to the whole of life. This

does not mean the performance of pious Christian practices. It means the information of the whole of life with basic Christian principles. It means putting first things first, and second things second. It means making whatever we make for use and not for profit, and understanding that "use" refers to spiritual as well as physical goods. It means ceasing to support by our buying a system that the popes have condemned as inhuman, and that reason shows us to be now threatening mankind with a universal suicide, and this means learning as rapidly as we can to support ourselves. It means living mentally where we live

physically, concerned with the matters that really concern us, and trying to control what we can control, and this is the true meaning of the much abused word "democracy." It means attending to our own affairs, the nourishment of our bodies and the nourishment of our souls. It means replacing competition by coöperation, exploitation by love, war by the Peace of Christ. It means the conscious attempt to withdraw from a system that is the implementation of the love of self, and replace it with one which implements the love of neighbor and of God.

—Graham Carey

NOTES

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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BROTHER FRANCISCUS, C.S.C., is a teacher and librarian in Brooklyn, N. Y. He is a free lance writer for Catholic periodicals, and has published three books for children.

JOHN HOWARD BENSON is a master carver and calligrapher working at The John Stevens Shop, Newport, Rhode Island. He has recently written an English translation and facsimile text of Arrighi's *Operina*, published by Yale University Press.

CLEMENS SCHMIDT, Wiesbaden, Germany, made the cover design which shows the constellation Leo, which stands for the summer and noonday, and especially for the Evangelist, St. Mark.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE SCULPTURE shown on page 75 is reproduced by permission of the artist from *The Sculpture of Ivan Mestrovic*, published by Syracuse University Press.

THE CRUCIFIX and icons on page 91 are reproduced through the courtesy of the Russian Center, Fordham University, New York City.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS on pages 96-8 are taken from the book, *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent*, by Miguel Covarrubias, and are reprinted with permission of the publishers, Alfred A. Knopf.

THE PAINTING reproduced on page 92 is a detail of the Coronation of Our Lady by Sano di Pietro in the Cathedral of Siena.

NOTES

A REMINDER: don't forget to send in your application for the Workshop on Art in Christian Education to the Director of Workshops, Catholic University of America, Washington 17, D. C. You won't want to miss this program of lectures, discussions, and seminars devoted to the problems of teachers of art from grade school through college. Detailed program on request.

WE'LL SEE YOU at the C.A.A. Convention at the College of Saint Rose in Albany, August 19 and 20. The theme of the Convention is "Liturgy and Art." The tentative program is outlined on page 102 of this issue.

C.A.A. CONVENTION - - 1955

The 1955 National Convention will be held at the College of Saint Rose, Albany, New York, on August 19 and 20.

Father Thomas Phelan, our Vice-President, is planning the general arrangement of the program with a somewhat different emphasis from that of conventions of previous years. All aspects of the convention will be parts of a single, rather simple idea, viz., the relation of liturgy to art and of art to liturgy. To help us to a fuller understanding of these two relationships, there will be two main means.

FIRST, there will be a series of four formal lectures, two on each of the days in which we will be in session, and these lectures will be supplemented by the greatest possible amount of informal discussion among the delegates.

1) "An Introduction to the Relationship of Liturgy and Art," by Dom Damasus Winzen, O.S.B., Prior of Mt. Savior Abbey, Elmira, N. Y.

2) "An Outline of the Pre-history and History of Architecture, Showing the Intimate Relationship between Architecture and Religion," by Graham Carey, Fair Haven, Vermont.

3) "The Natures and Shapes (*forma* and *figura*) of the Liturgical Garments," by Rev. Thomas Phelan, Troy, N. Y.

4) "The Place of Music in a Traditional Culture, with Special Reference to Liturgical Chant," Miss Ethel Thurston, Doctor of Music, New York, N. Y.

In addition, we hope for an informal talk during the first evening by Miss Adé Bethune, on the font and the altar.

SECOND, we hope to vitalize and strengthen our realization of the importance of our theme by a parallel set of activities. Besides *talking about* architecture, vestments, and music, we want, as far as we are able, to *practice* these arts. We hope to construct an altar, place it where it should be placed in relation to the worshipers, furnish it with appurtenances artistically worthy of their sacred functions, and offer the Sacrifice upon it, using the vestments and music which are the best available to us at the time.

In the past, our conventions have always been embellished with collections of objects of Christian art, chiefly drawings, paintings, and engravings. In the present case, the exhibits shown will be confined to objects of strictly liturgical application: vestments, vessels, missals, etc., the best we are able to obtain for the purpose, and the good and bad points of which can be freely and frankly discussed.

In addition, there will be sectional meetings for teachers on the elementary, high school, and college levels, for professional artists, for parents, and for seminarians.

The meeting of the Liturgical Week is being held in Worcester, Mass., right after our C.A.A. convention, and we are hoping to have the fullest possible coöperation and understanding between the two groups.

Final details of program will be sent to C.A.A. members in the president's pre-convention letter.

